



Ditchling Common

Distance: 11½ km=7½ miles

easy walking

Region: East Sussex

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Refreshments: Plumpton Green, Wivelsfield Green

Map: Explorer 122 (Brighton) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: feedback@fancyfreewalks.org

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Heath, long woodland trails, views, bluebells in spring

In Brief

This is an unusual walk, starting in a popular nature park close to the populated areas north of Brighton, but leading into solitary and secret places where you might not meet a single soul. As usual for this site, the route finds some unmarked forest paths where in late spring bluebells proliferate unseen. Along much of the way, your progress is made easier by the excellent stiles built by the Monday Group. As you return to the start you have the chance to rest and admire the views that so many come to enjoy. There are two good pubs along the route, both serving food

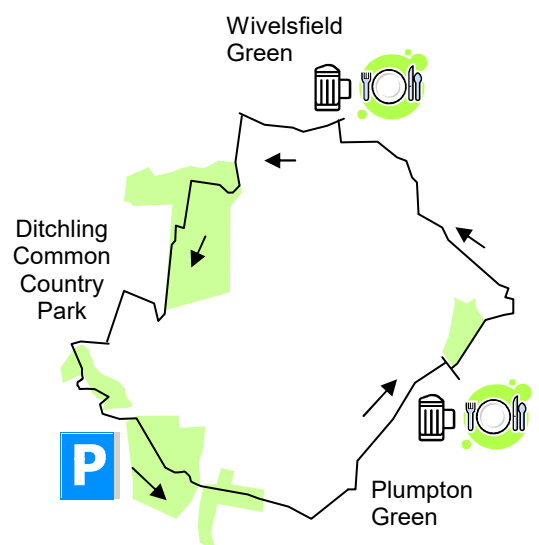


There are no nettles or brambles to worry bare legs. The terrain is woodland and pure fresh grass with no ploughed fields to cross. Boots are recommended because of the wealden forest and one or two wet patches. It is inadvisable to bring a dog because of the pheasant runs and occasional shooting.

→ This walk has some navigational challenges, especially in Leg 3, and walkers are advised to use the **map** link (which is very accurate) and bring a compass or a GPS device.

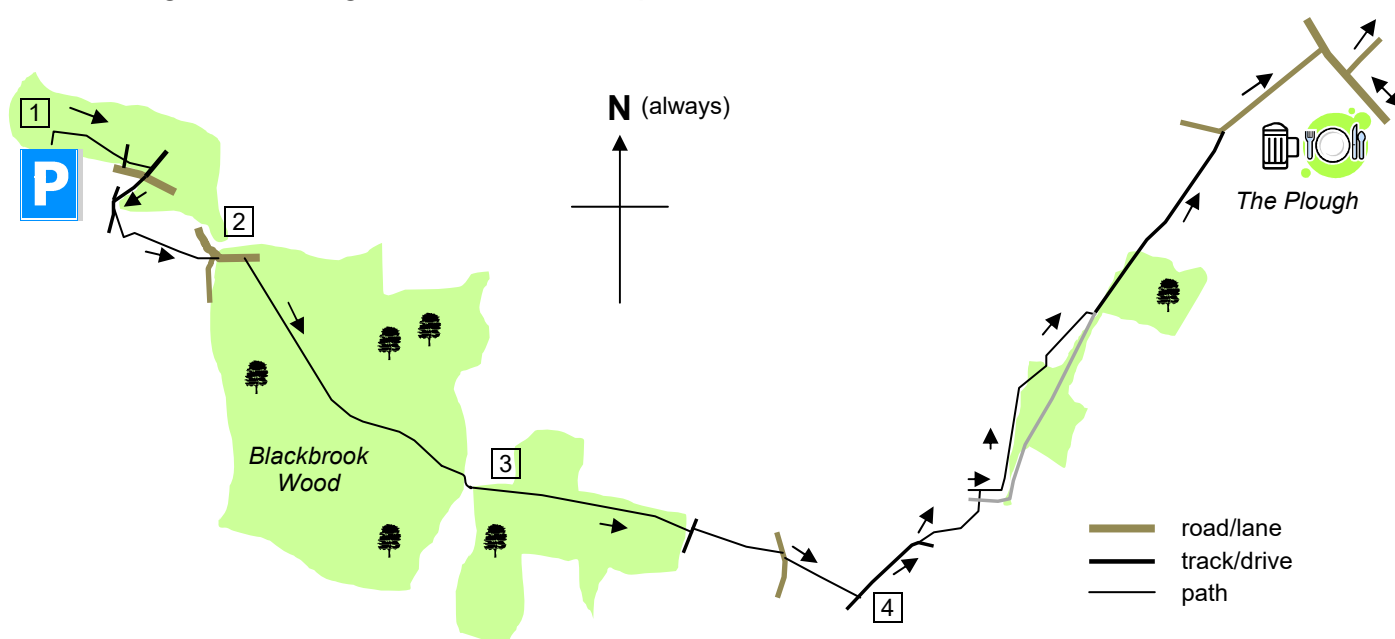
The walk begins at the **Ditchling Common** car park, East Sussex, off Folders Lane E, www.w3w.co/lifelong.seducing.clown, nearest postcode **BN6 8SQ**. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

Bird's Eye View



The Walk

Leg 1: Ditchling Common to Plumpton 4 km=2½ miles



- 1 With your back to the road, go out of the car park at the far right-hand corner, onto the grassy heath and immediately turn **right** on a clear path that shortly goes between two wooden posts. At a T-junction under trees, turn **right**, heading back towards the road. The path crosses a private drive for *the Hole* (a hobbitophile?). You reach a wide tarmac drive coming from an industrial site. Turn **right** to the road and cross it carefully to a sign-posted track opposite. Where the track bends left towards a cottage, shift **right** to merge with a wider track. But, about 15m before a large wooden gate, fork away **left** on a grassy path, passing a fingerpost and ignoring a step stile on your right. Go ahead over another step stile into a meadow and keep to the left-hand edge, passing a stone seat on your left. Go over a robust stile leading onto a narrow fenced path. A pair of plank bridges take you to a road junction.
- 2 Cross over the road and go straight ahead on the major road, Middleton Common Lane. Ignore a bridleway on your left and, just after that, go **right** by a dirt patch through a wooden barrier into woods. Your path leads straight ahead through Blackbrook Wood, a noted area for bluebells and wood anemones. The clear path runs straight for 900m through the wood, narrowing as it winds through shrubs in a slightly muddier section, and ends at a T-junction with a wide bridleway. Occasionally through gaps in the shrubs you might see glimpses of the view to the South Downs and Ditchling Beacon (*see the walk "Ditchling and Clayton Windmills" in this series*).
- 3 Turn **left** through a small wooden gate and immediately **right** over a 2-plank bridge with a stile on the far side. *Most stiles on this walk were built by the Monday Group, an organisation of volunteers in Sussex who build and maintain stiles and bridges. Remember, the top bar on these well-made stiles is normally raisable.* Go straight ahead in this pleasant grassy meadow, keeping about 20m from the right-hand edge. At the other side, go over a stile and a 3-plank bridge to a

tarmac lane. Turn **right** on the lane for 20m, then go **left** over a stile and a plank bridge into a sheep meadow. Cross the meadow diagonally on a faint path. On the other side, a stile and 2-plank bridge lead to a surfaced drive.

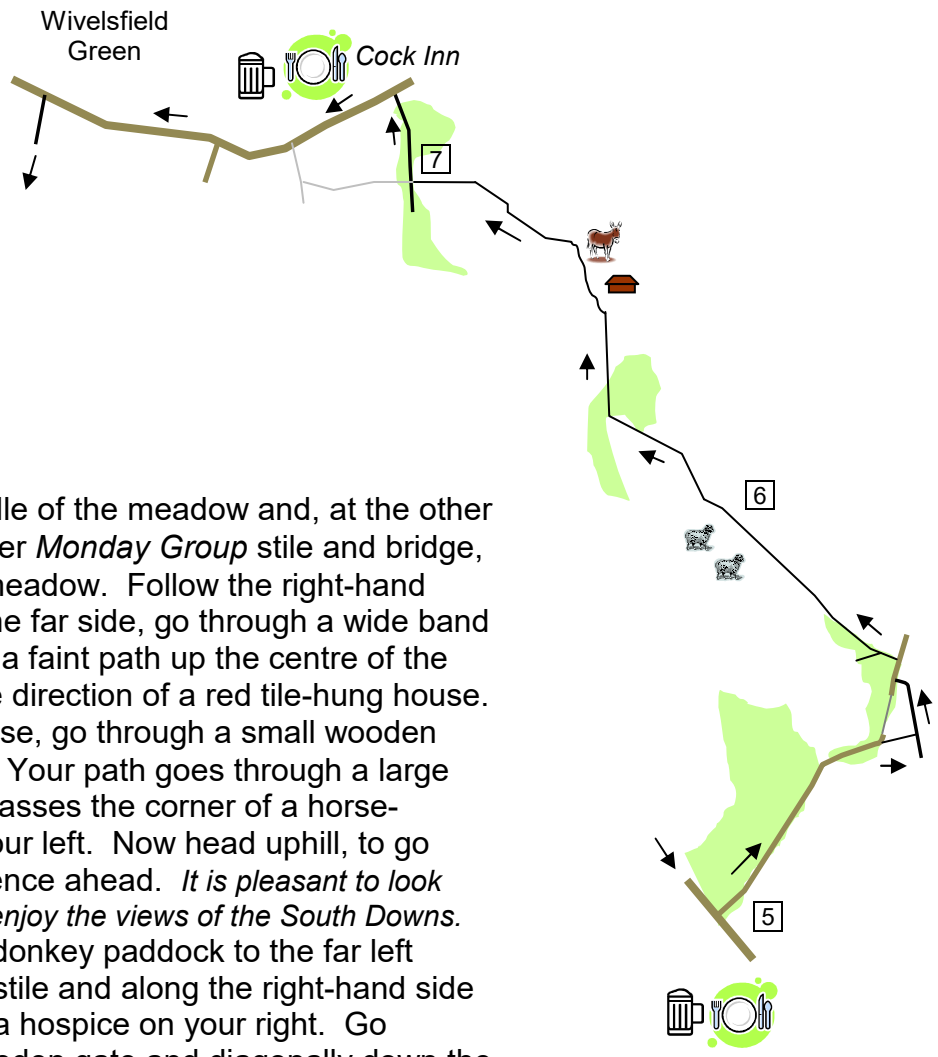
- 4 Turn **left** on the drive and follow it for 200m where it bends right towards a farm. **Leave** the drive here by keeping straight on through a wooden gate into a pasture with the farm on your right, keeping near the left-hand side. Ignore two farm gates on your left but go **left** through the 3rd (smaller) metal gate, to meet a 3-way fingerpost. Go straight ahead over a 3-plank bridge and a stile and turn **right** along the edge of a field. In the corner, turn sharp **left**, still along the field edge. In the top corner, go **right** at a fingerpost over a 3-plank bridge into woodland. When you emerge into a meadow, go straight ahead, gradually getting closer to the line of trees on your right, till you see a fingerpost. Go **right** here over a stile and turn **left** on a track. (*) Stay on the track, past bungalows, to reach a road, St Helena Lane, at a bend. Turn **right** on the road and follow it, ignoring footpaths left and right, as far as a T-junction with a major road, South Road. Turn **right** on the road using the narrow grass verge. In 70m, your route is **left** on Beresford Lane. But first you may wish to continue a little further along the road to the *Plough at Plumpton* pub/restaurant.



The Plough at Plumpton was once in the village but it was moved here during WW2, having been dismantled because it stood at the end of a temporary airfield. (One of the so-called Advanced Landing Grounds, built for the D-Day invasions.) The pub is often jam-packed with families, especially on a sunny weekend, because of its grand open-air facilities. Attendance is plumped up (excuse the pun) during race meetings at the Racecourse. Beer is Harveys from nearby Lewes. The standard pub menu is best eaten in the generous outdoor seating space. Next to the pub entrance is the RAF Chailey memorial to Polish airmen.

Leg 2: Plumpton to Wivelsfield 3¾ km=2½ miles

- 5 **See mini-map overleaf.** Having turned left on Beresford Lane (or right if coming back from the pub), follow this much quieter lane for 400m and stay on it as it bends right. Just after it bends left, immediately after the entrance to *The Firs*, go **right** on a dark and very narrow path between laurels. (Some walkers simply stay on the road if there is no traffic.) At a T-junction, turn **left** on a bridleway and follow it through bushes to the road. Turn **right** on the road for 50m and, just before the start of an open meadow, go **left** over a step stile on a path into woods. In just 10m you will be faced with a new wide mesh fence. Follow this to the **right**. (Beware the middle section of this path as it may be wet and muddy – even in June – with no alternative.) A stile takes you into a large open sheep meadow. *In the earlier seasons of the year, before the summer foliage erupts, looking right, you get a nice view of Chailey Windmill.*



6 Go across the middle of the meadow and, at the other side, go over another *Monday Group* stile and bridge, leading out into a meadow. Follow the right-hand perimeter and, at the far side, go through a wide band of trees. Now take a faint path up the centre of the next meadow in the direction of a red tile-hung house. On nearing the house, go through a small wooden gate and bear **left**. Your path goes through a large wooden gate and passes the corner of a horse-exercise area on your left. Now head uphill, to go over a stile in the fence ahead. *It is pleasant to look back at this point to enjoy the views of the South Downs.* Go across a small donkey paddock to the far left corner. Go over a stile and along the right-hand side of a meadow, with a hospice on your right. Go through a small wooden gate and diagonally down the centre of a horse pasture. In the bottom corner, keep **right** over a stile and follow a path between string fences. Opposite a large modern white house, bear slightly left on a grassy path beside a string fence. You come over a stile and along a boardwalk to meet a wide crossing path.

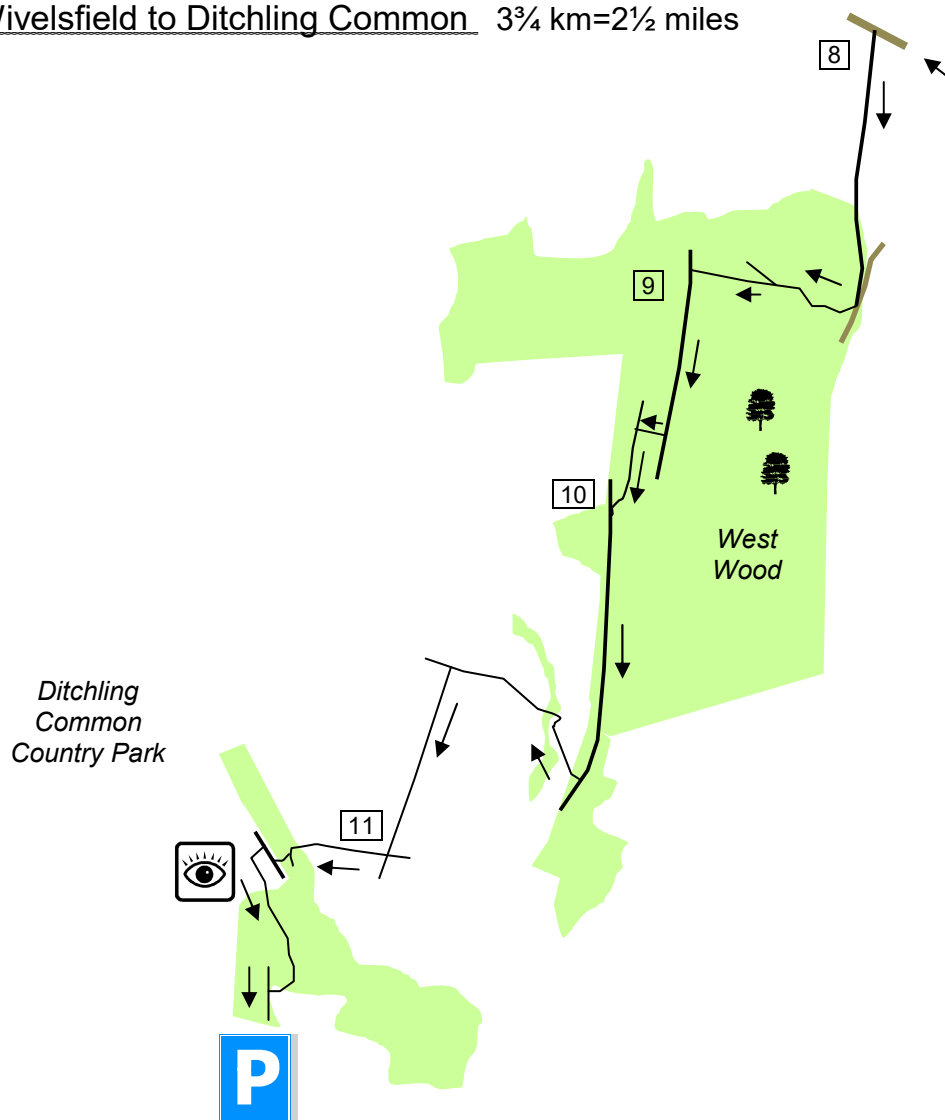
7 Turn **right** on the crossing path and follow it, soon passing new houses over on your left, to reach the main road in 250m, next to *Oakside*. Turn **left** on the road, quickly gaining the footway. In 350m, you reach the *Cock Inn*, an unpretentious but surprisingly thoughtful town pub.



The “Cock” serves light snacks such as jacket potatoes, and lunches such as their “aromatic garden burger” all at reasonable prices. Note that they also serve coffee and home-made teas.

Continue along the road, passing a general store (closed on Sun) and ignoring a side road. Stay on this good wide footway for 400m, enjoying the views of the green hillside on your left, passing the entrances to some swanky properties. Just before *Field House*, turn **left** on a signposted public bridleway.

Leg 3: Wivelsfield to Ditchling Common 3¾ km=2½ miles



- 8 Follow the wide path along an avenue of oaks, over a stream and up into woods. As your path levels out, it joins a tarmac lane coming from your left. Turn **right** on the lane for only 15m and turn **right** at a little fingerpost through a wooden swing-gate on a footpath. Soon on your right is a broad deep hollow. [2020: care! the next section may need special concentration.] Follow the well-worn path just behind the hollow marked with new marker posts, ignoring paths going off to the right. You pass on your right a little 2-way fingerpost with yellow arrows (and ignoring a path that forks right just before the post). At the marker post keep ahead, as directed by the yellow arrow, passing another one further on.
- 9 Follow the path over a wooden bridge and a ditch. Immediately after, at a little 2-way fingerpost, keep ahead, ignoring the turning right as directed, until 50m further on you reach a large hollow. Continue straight ahead down into the hollow and up the other side to a T-junction. Turn **right*** until you meet a wide horse path near the edge of the woods. (*Some walkers take a short cut by going straight ahead over some mounds to reach the edge of the wood.) Turn **left** on this wide horse path and take any of the parallel paths, slightly uphill, through the woods for about 600m. Cross a bridge with handrails and a ditch marked as a bridleway. (You are on part of the Sussex Border Path again.) Ahead of you are fields and houses which you need to keep in view to be sure of your direction.

10 The path goes through a wide muddy section (wide enough to stay dry if you pick your route) and continues ahead with a meadow visible on your right. In 350, you become aware of a green meadow, this time on the **left** side, with a house visible at the end. In less than 100m, look sharp **right** for a narrow path leading to a stile. Go over this stile and take a diagonal path across the pasture, almost doubling back on your original direction. In the far corner, go through a gap and immediately **left** over a stile and over a stream in a band of trees. Cross another stile-or-gate and a stile, going straight across the pasture. At the far side, cross a stile-or-gate and carry on towards farm buildings. Just past the first barn, you will see a small 3-way fingerpost. Go **left** here over a *Monday Group* stile (or through one of the large metal gates, if open). Cross the pasture to a V-stile next to some metal gates, followed by a 3-plank bridge, and follow the path between fences to go through a metal swing-gate to a crossing path by some tall hedges and fences.

11 Turn **right** on the crossing path between hedges, passing a duck pond on your left. In 200m, your path zigzags to meet a path in woodland. Go **left and immediately right** on a narrow path, then **right** at a T-junction. In 20m, go **left** through a large metal kissing-gate onto the open hillside of Ditchling Common Country Park. This is your last chance to sit on a bench (just to your right) and admire the view that many people come for.



Ditchling Common was originally part of the Saxon Manor and hence King's land. The Country Park is run by the Woodland Trust and its owner, East Sussex C.C. It covers 188 acres (=76 ha) of open hillside, heath, scrubland and undulating forest. Exmoor ponies graze in the smaller fields and the stud field during the winter and the park has two public angler's ponds.

Turn **left** along the edge of the common. Ignore a metal gate in the first corner but continue a little further to a wooden swing-gate with an arrow indicating a nature walk. Stay on the path as it snakes its way past several picnic tables, ignoring paths off to the right. The path swings right at a 5-way junction where there is a wooden bench seat and a picnic table. Take the **third** path on the **left** (basically straight ahead), ending at a left-then-right turning to reach the Ditchling Common car park where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: if coming from the M25 area, take the M23/A23 to the turnoff for **Burgess Hill**. At the roundabout at the start of the town, turn **left** as for Haywards Heath. Keep **left** at the next roundabout and turn **right** at the third roundabout. Follow signs for *Town Centre* or *Burgess Hill Station*. Immediately after the station veer a fraction **right** at a roundabout on Keymer Road. Turn **left** on Folders Lane where you see a sign for *Ditchling Common*. You will shortly see the first brown tourist sign for *Ditchling Common Country Park*.

By bus/train: bus **271** runs from Haywards Heath and Burgess Hill to Wivelsfield, including Sat and Sun. Several other buses run this route, but not at weekends or not on Sunday. Check the "Bus Times" webpages. Note that so-called Wivelsfield Station is at least 1½ miles from the village.

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